

Everybody eats: CSA's food bank allows needy seniors to select groceries



Written by Eren Gökner - Special to the Town Crier

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Photo Left Photo By Eren Gknar/Special To The Town Crier Below Photo Courtesy Of CsaA woman chooses a can from the stocked shelves at the Community Services Agency's food bank in Mountain View, left. LaDrea Clark, below, nutrition and health education assistant in CSA's Food and Nutrition Center, oversees the program.

It may not seem like much, but to some seniors, even \$2 or \$3 is too much to pay for food.

Seniors who need financial as well as nutritional assistance can participate in the Brown Bag lunch program 9:30 a.m. Tuesdays at the Mountain View Senior Center at 266 Escuela Ave. The program targets low-income and homeless seniors under the aegis of Second Harvest Food Bank in San Jose. Eligible seniors line up to receive prepackaged groceries.

However, it's not the only assistance in town for seniors who are struggling to make ends meet. The Community Services Agency also serves seniors on Tuesdays, from 2 to 4 p.m.

At CSA's food bank, seniors "shop" for their own food from shelves packed with donations from local businesses.

One senior, who preferred not to be identified, expressed his gratitude for CSA's program, which he said was "very orderly and very well run." The once-homeless man, who has been coming to the food bank for a year, said he likes the fact that "here you can pick and choose." This way, he also conserves resources, he said, because he only takes what he needs. He had nothing but praise for the staff, calling them "absolutely wonderful."

At the Mountain View Senior Center, local resident Lync Brusoe said the supplemental food "comes in handy."

However, he said, "The farther you get from Second Harvest (in San Jose), the less food you get."

Retired from the U.S. Navy, Brusoe subsists on his pension and Social Security

payments.

To qualify to receive the free groceries, seniors must meet federal poverty guidelines, which depend on household size, and reside in Mountain View, Los Altos or Los Altos Hills. After CSA verifies his or her income, the senior receives a card to present every week. Red stars on the card tip off volunteers that the senior is homeless and therefore requires nonperishable items that do not need heating. They can also ask for soups with pop-top cans.

LaDrea Clark, the nutrition and health education assistant in CSA's Food and Nutrition Center, oversees the food bank on a part-time basis, accepting donations that Second Harvest Food Bank makes to local non-profit agencies. The food bank opens to other low-income groups at CSA's offices at 204 Stierlin Road in Mountain View 2-4 p.m. weekdays and 10 a.m. to noon Mondays and Thursdays.

Second Harvest is not the only food provider. Local donations come from Village Harvest, a group of volunteers who pick hanging fruit from residential trees, as well as from local farmers' markets and from Hidden Villa's organic gardens. Village Harvest volunteers often leave fruit at the food bank on weekends for distribution during the week.

Low-income seniors choose what they use

Clark examines the donated food, deciding which items will stay and which must be discarded. She ensures that the expiration dates are valid, disposing of items past their "eat by" dates.

The bags contain staples like rice and beans, protein such as ground turkey or chicken and seasonal fresh fruits and produce. Clark also stocks the seniors' supplies with nutritious snacks.

This is the first year CSA has dedicated one day a week to seniors, said Clark, who added that seniors make up approximately 40 percent of her customers.

To meet seniors' special dietary needs, Clark tries to provide a dozen eggs and extra fresh vegetables.

"They need more vitamins and more protein, because as they get older, they need more to stay healthy," she said.

To minimize waste, Clark organizes the groceries as one would find in a market, presenting food on shelves and encouraging seniors to choose only what they can use.

“The clients can then take what they need, depending on their personal tastes,” Clark said. “If they can use it, they can have it.”

Clark’s passion for promoting healthful living came at an early age. The 38-year-old Mountain View resident grew up in a vegetarian home. At one point, though, she added chicken and other meats to her diet. When she realized that the meat made her feel sluggish, she reverted to her vegetarian roots. She researches natural healing remedies for her family’s aches and pains and calls herself a “naturalist.”

For more information on the Community Services Agency’s food bank, call 968-0836 or visit www.csacares.org. For more on the Brown Bag program, call 903-6330. For more on Second Harvest Food Bank, call (800) 984-3663.

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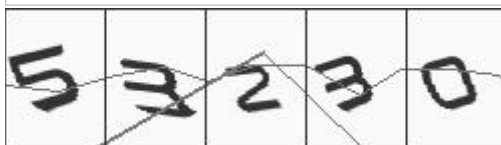
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